

## STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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### THE SUFFOLK CAMPAIGN: AN ANALYSIS OF A CIVIL WAR CAMPAIGN AND ITS RELEVANCE TO TODAY'S JOINT DOCTRINE

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## ABSTRACT

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In early May, 1863, Confederate General Robert E. Lee fought and won the battle of Chancellorsville. Many historians believe this was his greatest triumph. He did so without a portion of his veteran II Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General James Longstreet. Earlier, Longstreet had been ordered to conduct an important operation against Suffolk, Virginia, a town whose defense was key to Union held Norfolk, Virginia. Longstreet's offensive campaign and the defense by Union ground and naval forces provide for an interesting case study on joint operations. This study will focus on the fundamentals of joint warfare, how they were applied during the Suffolk campaign, and their relevancy today.

## Introduction

In 1986, with the passing of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the military services embarked on a new era, with greater emphasis on jointness. But "jointness" is not without historical precedent. The Vicksburg Campaign, conducted during the American Civil War by Major General Ulysses S. Grant and Rear Admiral David D. Porter, is regarded as one of this nation's earliest, most successful joint operations. However, other less successful joint ventures were conducted during this same period in our history, and their "lessons learned" should be studied as well. The Suffolk Campaign, conducted in April-May, 1863, in southeastern Virginia, is one such campaign.

The fundamentals of joint warfare, listed in Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States and derived from the principles of war, represent the best efforts of U.S. military thinkers to encompass all aspects and characteristics of joint warfare. These fundamentals of joint warfare are:

- Unity of Effort
- Concentration of Military Power
- Seizing and Maintaining the Initiative
- Agility
- Operations Extended to Fullest Breadth and Depth
- Maintaining Freedom of Action
- Sustaining Operations
- Clarity of Expression
- Knowledge of Self
- Knowledge of the Enemy<sup>1</sup>

It can be construed, then, that violation of these fundamentals, either in part or in whole, will severely

jeopardize the joint operation. This paper will examine three of these fundamentals (Unity of Effort, Concentration of Military Power, and Sustaining Operations) in relation to the Suffolk Campaign, examine how well they were applied, and determine the relevancy of the Suffolk Campaign to current joint operations.

### **Strategic Setting**

With the beginning of the new year, 1863 brought new hopes of victory for both the North and the South. President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, first issued after the Union victory at Antietam, was signed into law on January 1, 1863, raising the Union's participation in the war to a higher level. Major General Ulysses S. Grant, in cooperation with Rear Admiral David D. Porter, had initiated his campaign to take the Confederate stronghold at Vicksburg. Union Major General William S. Rosecrans and the Army of the Cumberland had just defeated Lieutenant General Braxton Bragg at the Battle of Stones River, but failed to pursue the defeated Confederate Army and take full advantage of their victory.

President Lincoln's greatest concern, however, lay in the east. The eastern theater of the Civil War, where both belligerents' capitals were scarcely one hundred miles apart, had been the primary theater of operations since the outbreak of war. Both sides considered it their eastern Armies' primary function to protect their respective capitals. Each side considered its capital as its center of gravity, a term defined in Joint

Publication 3-0 as those characteristics, capabilities, or locations from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, early in the war, the loss of either capital would have been a severe blow to the credibility of its government. The Union's cry of "on to Richmond" had essentially become the primary strategic goal of the North. On the other hand, Lee understood all too well the United States' sensitivity toward the defense of their capital, Washington D.C., and tried to use this to his advantage throughout the war.

President Lincoln, continuing his search for leadership for the Army of the Potomac, realized that another change of command was necessary. After Fredericksburg, he reluctantly relieved Major General Ambrose E. Burnside and placed Major General Joseph Hooker in command. Hooker was the sixth commander of the Army of the Potomac since the outbreak of war, and Lincoln had serious concerns regarding his ability to command. Lincoln knew he had a demoralized Army and hoped Hooker could reorganize and re-instill a fighting spirit within the Army, which again faced Lee across the Rappahannock River. Until President Lincoln found the man who could, as he said, "face the arithmetic," he would have to continue to act as his own Commander-in-Chief. Lincoln knew he lacked the military knowledge to prosecute the war successfully , and had attempted, through the appointment of Major General Henry W. Halleck as General-in-Chief, to provide himself with sound military advice and unify the command structure of the Union

Armies. Lincoln, however, over the period of time since Halleck's appointment, had come to regard the General as little more than a clerk, albeit a first rate one.<sup>3</sup>

Confederate President Jefferson Davis and the South also had their problems. In December, 1862, Davis travelled extensively in the South, making speeches in order to lift the morale of the Southern people. It had always been the hope of the Confederacy to receive recognition and material help from Great Britain or France. The Union's Emancipation Proclamation changed this outlook. The freeing of the slaves moved the conflict to a higher level. Both France and Great Britain had, much earlier, outlawed slavery in their countries and were politically unprepared to ally themselves with a nation that not only condoned slavery, but institutionalized it. President Davis had already come to this realization, clearly illustrated in a speech to the Mississippi legislature in Jackson on December 26, 1862. He stated,

Put not your trust in Princes, and rest not on  
your hopes on foreign nations. This war is ours;  
we must fight it ourselves. And I feel some pride  
in knowing that, so far, we have done it without  
the good will of anybody.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Army of Northern Virginia had just won a great victory at Fredericksburg, in the west, southern arms were not proving as successful. Bragg's defeat at the Battle of Stones River opened much of Tennessee to Union occupation. Confederate General Joseph Johnston closely watched Union General Ulysses S. Grant as Grant's campaign to capture Vicksburg progressed.

Additionally, the Union naval blockade of the southern coastline, known as the Anaconda Plan, was becoming effective. Union naval forces had combined with Army elements to take several ports along the southern coastline, to include New Bern, North Carolina; Washington, North Carolina; Norfolk, Virginia; and New Orleans, Louisiana. The Union intent was to strangle the Confederacy by enveloping it from all sides: the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Mississippi River.<sup>5</sup> In fact, its purpose was to deny the South the economic trade necessary to sustain its armies and pay for the war. This was an enormous task, considering the 3500 miles of coastline extending from Virginia to the Rio Grande River. Central to this strategy was the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia. Its mission was to enforce the blockade and interdict blockade runners, which were becoming more important for sustaining southern arms in the field. The ports of Charleston, South Carolina, and Wilmington, North Carolina, were vital to the South and to the supply of Lee's forces.

The Army of Northern Virginia was successfully supplied from the vicinity of the Rappahannock, western Virginia, the upper Shenandoah Valley, southwestern Virginia, and south central North Carolina and Georgia.<sup>6</sup> The Petersburg and Weldon Railroad was, for the Army of Northern Virginia, the sole rail supply line east of the Blue Ridge, bringing supplies from the Carolinas and Georgia.<sup>7</sup> This rail line was becoming increasingly important as the available food stocks within the vicinity of the Army of



Northern Virginia became exhausted. Lee brought this issue to the attention of the Confederate Secretary of War, James A Seddon, in mid-January, 1863.<sup>8</sup> The condition of his Army was also revealed in a letter home to his wife in early February, 1863. Lee wrote,

We are in a liquid state at present, up to our knees in mud and what is worse, on short rations for men and beasts. I am willing to starve myself, but cannot bear my men or horses to be pinched. I fear many of the latter will die.<sup>9</sup>

Lee was contemplating offensive action, but lack of food, road conditions, and the fact that the Union Army of the Potomac still faced him along the Rappahannock forced him to remain on the defensive. It would be the Union movement toward Suffolk, Virginia, that would awaken the Army of Northern Virginia and set the Suffolk Campaign in motion.

### **Campaign Summary**

Major General Joseph Hooker, now in command of the Army of the Potomac, thought it best for morale purposes to distance Burnside's old Corps from the rest of the Army.<sup>10</sup> On February 14, the Union IX Corps embarked at Belle Plains, Virginia, and travelled by boat to Suffolk, Virginia. Suffolk, according to the census of 1860, had a population of 1,395, more than half of whom were black.<sup>11</sup> Situated at the head of the Nansemond River, Suffolk controlled a large and fertile agricultural region. The Weldon Railroad running north to Petersburg was forty-five miles west and its location was key to the approaches to the lower

reaches of the James River north of the Dismal Swamp.<sup>12</sup> (See Map 1) The Nansemond River, flowing northeasterly, joined the James River twenty miles below the town, while the swamp south of the Nansemond River extended its dense marshland to the skirts of the village. The surrounding country was flat, intersected by swampy streams and forests, mostly of Southern Pine.<sup>13</sup> Located seventeen miles southwest of Portsmouth, Virginia, the Suffolk defenses protected the approaches to Norfolk that lay across Hampton Roads from Portsmouth.<sup>14</sup> Following Major General George B. McClellan's failed Peninsular Campaign in late September, 1862, a Federal force of nearly 10,000 men, under Major General John J. Peck, moved into Suffolk and began to fortify it.<sup>15</sup>

The combination of the Union's IX Corp's 15,000 soldiers and the Union forces already established along coastal Virginia at Suffolk, Yorktown, Williamsburg, Fort Monroe, Norfolk, and Portsmouth, would exceed some 40,000 soldiers. Opposing this force along the Blackwater River, which flowed north to south, were some 3000 to 5000 Confederates.<sup>16</sup> This defensive line was only forty miles southeast of Petersburg, Virginia. With McClellan's Peninsular Campaign only eight month's past, official Richmond, and in particular Jefferson Davis, considered this a viable threat. Lee, in a letter to his son, G.W.C. Lee, in late February, addressed the possible Union intentions:

The enemy seems very strong in our front.  
Cannot ascertain yet what he is going to do,  
unless it is to remain as he is, till better  
weather, then push his columns now at Newport  
News up James River, thus cause us to fall  
back, and to move his Army now in the  
Rappahannock across the River seems to be  
his best plan.<sup>17</sup>

In compliance with President Davis' orders, Lee dispatched two divisions, commanded by Major General George E. Pickett and Major General John B. Hood, to the vicinity of Richmond and ordered the II Corps commander, Lieutenant General James Longstreet, to join them. Lee also indicated that he was prepared to send the remainder of Longstreet's Corps (two divisions) if necessary.<sup>18</sup>

Longstreet made his headquarters at Petersburg, Virginia and assumed command of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina on February 26, 1863.<sup>19</sup> This was an extremely large area, encompassing thousands of square miles and including within its jurisdiction three separate sub-departments: the Department of Richmond, commanded by Major General Arnold Elzey, which included the Richmond defenses and the James River-York River Peninsula down to Williamsburg; the Department of Southern Virginia, commanded by Major General Samuel G. French, which included that portion of Virginia south of the James River and east to the Blackwater River where Confederate defenders faced the Union stronghold of Suffolk; and the Department of North Carolina, commanded by Major General D. H. Hill, which encompassed the entire state.<sup>20</sup> Longstreet's command consisted

of almost 43,000 troops, to include Hood's and Pickett's divisions.<sup>21</sup> Most of these soldiers, however, were garrisoning important defensive positions and could not be freed for offensive operations.

Longstreet received four separate missions from a variety of superiors. His first mission, directed by President Davis, provided for the defense of the Capital. The second mission, directed by Lee, required Longstreet to position his troops so they could quickly be returned to the Rappahannock on short notice. Secretary of State Seddon directed the third mission which was to encourage the garrisons of southeast Virginia and North Carolina to gather foodstuffs for transport to the Army of Northern Virginia. A fourth mission, also initiated by Secretary Seddon, stated that Longstreet should "conduct a close reconnaissance of Suffolk with the view of attacking it, if you think it is advisable and it can be done with advantage."<sup>22</sup>

Longstreet quickly organized his new command, determined to carry out his missions. The first mission Longstreet completed successfully through the deployment and placement of his two veteran divisions. As proof, Secretary of War Seddon wrote Lee, "General Longstreet is here, and under his able guidance of such troops, no one entertains any doubt as to the entire safety of the capital."<sup>23</sup> In accordance with his second mission, Longstreet placed Hood's and Pickett's divisions at Petersburg and Falling Creek, alongside the railroad to facilitate their return to Lee if necessary.<sup>24</sup> In keeping with his third mission,

Longstreet ordered an attack by Major General Hill on New Berne, North Carolina, which took place from March 13-15, 1863. Although it failed to take the town, the assault allowed Hill's forces to conduct foraging operations in the surrounding counties with minimal risk of Union intervention. Hill, then ordered by Longstreet to take Washington, North Carolina, again failed but did manage to open the counties to the east of the town to the subsistence and quartermaster's departments of the Confederacy.<sup>25</sup>

On March 17, in response to a Union cavalry attack at Kelly's Ford along the Rappahannock River, Lee recalled Pickett's and Hood's veteran divisions. At the time, Lee believed the attack to be part of the long-awaited Union offensive. When he determined that the attack was only a probing action, General Lee, on March 19, countermanded the order and returned operational control of the divisions back to Longstreet.<sup>26</sup> Longstreet then turned his attention toward Suffolk and his fourth mission.

In a letter to Lee, dated March 24, 1863, Longstreet put forth his plan to go to Suffolk and requested an additional division out of his old corps. Lee refused the third division, but essentially approved the use of Hood's and Pickett's divisions in the operation. Additionally, Lee suggested to Longstreet that he solicit the Navy for support to control the navigation on the Nansemond River.<sup>27</sup> Longstreet heeded the advice and requested the naval support; it was denied by President Davis.

On April 2, Lee informed Longstreet the intelligence that the Union IX Corps, or at least a portion of it, had been sent westward to re-enforce Rosecrans in Tennessee and advised him:

You are to make any movement that you may consider available; but. . .As stated in former letters, so long as the enemy choose to remain on the defensive and covered by their entrenchments and floating batteries I fear you can accomplish but little, except to draw provisions from the invaded districts. If you can accomplish this, it will be of positive benefit. I leave the whole matter to your good judgement.<sup>28</sup>

As Longstreet prepared to launch his attack on Suffolk, he described to Lee his objective: "I do not propose to do anything more than draw out the supplies from that country unless something very favorable should offer."<sup>29</sup> By April 6, Longstreet had concentrated on the Blackwater River an army of 23,000 men and fifty guns, consisting of Hood's and Pickett's divisions and a division commanded by Major General Samuel G. French, formed for this operation from the Department of Southern Virginia.

The Union Army commander of the Department of Eastern Virginia, headquartered at Ft. Monroe, was Major General John A. Dix, a veteran of the War of 1812 who was called back to service at the outbreak of the Civil War. He had served as President Buchanan's last Secretary of the Treasury and had obvious political clout.<sup>30</sup>

His Union Naval counterpart was acting Rear Admiral Samuel P. Lee, a grandson of Richard Henry "Light-horse Harry" Lee and a cousin of Robert E. Lee. Admiral Lee had been commanding the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron since July, 1862. Since his

arrival, Admiral Lee had questioned the Army practice of issuing permits allowing local citizenry to send merchandise north.<sup>31</sup> Admiral Lee believed this practice violated the intent of the blockade and, although supported by the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, was ultimately overruled by President Lincoln.<sup>32</sup> These permits would remain a contentious issue between the Army and the Navy.

Dix's command consisted of a number of outposts in eastern Virginia and the vicinity: Fort Monroe; Camp Hamilton; Norfolk; Yorktown; Port Lookout, Maryland; and Suffolk, which was the largest in terms of soldiers assigned. When the IX Corps was shipped west to join Rosecrans, one division, that of Brigadier General George Getty, was detached and sent to Suffolk; he reported to Major General John J. Peck, at Suffolk.<sup>33</sup> Peck's command consisted of general support artillery and cavalry units, and two divisions: one commanded by himself in the southern portion of the defenses, and the other by Getty, posted in the northern portion of the defenses from Fort Halleck to the Nansemond River. (See Map 2) With the addition of Getty's division, the Suffolk defenses now had some forty-four artillery pieces, and 15,000 officers and men present for duty. Peck put the Suffolk defenders to work, and by April, 1863, Suffolk boasted a fourteen mile perimeter with eight forts interspersed at key locations.<sup>34</sup>

On the morning of April 11, 1863, Longstreet crossed the Blackwater River and opened the Suffolk Campaign. By evening, his lead elements surprised the Union pickets and drove them back into their defenses. The Union forces, forewarned of the Confederate approach by a runaway slave, withdrew their infantry and artillery from along the Nansemond River, leaving only skirmishers in defense of the river. Peck left the defenses of his right flank to the Union Navy.<sup>35</sup> The Union gunboats that patrolled the Nansemond were small but potentially very influential, particularly in defense against a Confederate bridging, or river crossing operation. Currently on the river were four gunboats, two Army and two Navy.<sup>36</sup> Admiral Lee had two officers currently in command on the Nansemond River. Lieutenant William B. Cushing, in overall command, was stationed in the lower Nansemond, and Lieutenant Roswell H. Lamson was stationed in the upper Nansemond.

Admiral Lee instructed his lieutenants on April 12 to fully "cooperate" with the Army, but he knew that his gunboats, little more than small armed ferry boats, would be no match for well emplaced enemy field artillery batteries. He expressed his frustration with the Army's commitment to occupy so many detached and weak positions, and to rely on the Navy to make those positions tenable.<sup>37</sup> In response to Army requests, Admiral Lee ordered an additional four boats into the Nansemond River, drawing the reinforcements from the Potomac flotilla.



Six miles northeast of Suffolk was Hill's Point, where the confluence of the western branch of the Nansemond River met the upper and lower (wider) portions of the River. The upper Nansemond was navigable, but had many twists and turns and in some portions was little more than a creek. There was a sand bar just below the point that drew only seven feet of water at high tide.<sup>38</sup> Hill's Point had been fortified earlier by the Confederacy (Fort Huger) during McClellan's Peninsular Campaign. Lee remembered the position and had passed on its importance to Longstreet.<sup>39</sup>

Longstreet knew if he were to take Suffolk, he must have control of the Nansemond River. On the evening of April 13, a battery under the command of Captain Robert H. Stribling reoccupied Fort Huger at Hill's Point. This position controlled passage to the upper Nansemond River. Additionally, other batteries erected earthwork positions along the river in order to bring under fire the Union gunboats. Stribling's battery produced immediate results, severely damaging one of the Union gunboats and effectively closing down the upper Nansemond River to navigation. The way was open if Longstreet chose to cross the river and complete the investment of Suffolk. Longstreet, after the initial contact with Union forces well entrenched in their defensive positions in Suffolk, ordered his forces to dig siege entrenchments. He appeared content to keep the Union forces within their defensive positions while his commissary agents scoured the countryside, obtaining and transporting foodstuffs.

Meanwhile, the Union naval and ground forces were attempting to coordinate their defense of Suffolk. Getty, who had not agreed with Peck on surrendering the river line to the Confederates, received permission to initiate the defense of the river. He subsequently placed many of his batteries in a counter-fire role to suppress Confederate batteries that were impeding the navigation of the upper Nansemond. Two attempts were made, using both naval and ground forces, to take Hill's Point, but both failed due to loss of surprise and poor coordination between the forces. To force Peck and the Army to take action against Hill's Point, Admiral Lee issued a veiled threat. On April 18, he gave Lamson the discretionary authority to withdraw from the upper Nansemond if his lines of communications could not be maintained. At the same time, Admiral Lee let Peck know that Lamson and his gunboats were needed elsewhere. The battery at Hill's Point should be taken or silenced.<sup>40</sup> Both Dix and Peck immediately responded to the threat, stating that the gunboats in the upper Nansemond were imperative to the Union defense.<sup>41</sup> Lamson and Getty prepared a third attempt to take Fort Huger. This time, personally led by Getty, the soldiers, after a bombardment from Lamson's gunboats, took the fort.

The Union soldiers immediately went to work strengthening the defenses of the old fort. With Suffolk's water communications finally reestablished, and the Army in control of Fort Huger and Hill's Point, Peck shocked the defenders by

ordering their withdrawal from the captured stronghold. He thought it too risky to fortify a position on the Confederate side of the river. When told of the orders, an enraged Lamson pleaded with Getty to maintain his position, but to no avail. Admiral Lee was just as displeased, having risked his gunboats in a daring enterprise, only to see the Army relinquish Fort Huger the night of April 20. The evacuation of the fort left the Navy with no other choice but to order its gunboats into the lower Nansemond. The evacuated works left intact by the Union forces were reoccupied by the Confederates the following day.

The immediate threat to Suffolk had passed. By April 30, Peck had been reinforced and was at the same comparative strength as his opponents.<sup>42</sup> These reinforcements allowed him to initiate a number of sorties aimed at determining the strengths and positions of his Confederate adversaries. All were hotly contested, but the initiative was now with the defenders.

On April 27, Longstreet wrote Secretary of War Seddon and stated that if the reports of his quartermaster and subsistence officers were to be believed, he would require an additional month to haul out all the supplies around Suffolk.<sup>43</sup> A letter received that same day from Lee indicated that Hooker's Army was stirring, but provided no date for Longstreet's force to return to the Rappahannock.<sup>44</sup> On April 29, Longstreet first received word that the Army of the Potomac was crossing the Rappahannock in force. The following day, he received orders to "move without

delay with your command, to effect a junction with General Lee."<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, Longstreet had asked the War Department if he should abandon his trains and risk a quick withdrawal of all troops.<sup>46</sup> On May 1, Longstreet received a reply. "The order sent you was to secure all possible dispatch without incurring loss of trains or unnecessary hazard of troops."<sup>47</sup> Longstreet immediately planned his withdrawal. On the night of May 3, Longstreet's three divisions broke contact, and with little interference from the Suffolk defenders, found themselves across the Blackwater River by the next evening. On the march, they learned of Lee's great victory and the loss of General Jackson. The Suffolk campaign was completed.

## **Analysis of Joint Warfare Fundamentals**

Joint Pub 1 states that "success in war demands that all effort be directed toward the achievement of common aims."<sup>48</sup> The first joint fundamental to be examined in the context of the Suffolk Campaign will be "Unity of Effort".

There was little unity of effort in the missions Longstreet received from his superiors. These missions, upon scrutiny, conflict with each other. While the defense of Richmond, foraging operations, and the capture of Suffolk could be combined, Longstreet could not be expected to accomplish these missions and also fulfill Lee's requirement to return Hood's and Pickett's divisions to Lee in a timely manner. The conflicting orders Longstreet received are evidence that Davis, Seddon, and Lee did not exchange full information concerning their respective advice to Longstreet. It may be added that this confusion was normal throughout the entire war and contributed, possibly in large measure, to the ineffective employment of detached large bodies of the Confederate Armies.<sup>49</sup>

The command structure for this operation also restricted unity of effort. If Longstreet was now an independent commander, did he have command of Pickett's and Hood's divisions? Based on Lee's recall of these divisions, after the Kelly's Ford incident, the answer is "no." The command structure was not formalized until April 1, 1863, when General Order #34 was published,

placing Longstreet's entire command "under the supervision and general direction of General R.E. Lee."<sup>50</sup>

Lack of naval support also hindered Longstreet's efforts to take Suffolk. The Confederate Navy, and in particular the Confederate ironclad, CSS Richmond, was currently in the James River upstream above obstructions designed to impede the Union Navy. These obstructions consisted of sunken barges and tree trunks embedded in the river bottom. For the Confederate Navy to participate, these obstructions had to be removed, then replaced, following the Navy's passage down the river. The naval support, even just one ironclad, was critical to negate the Federal gunboats patrolling the Nansemond River. Both Lee and Longstreet believed this support necessary in order to conduct successful river crossing operations. No joint command structure was formulated to deal with such requests, however, and even Secretary of War Seddon could not move the Confederate bureaucracy. In fact, the decision not to send the naval support rested with President Davis. He agreed with his staff's recommendation not to risk the only ironclad they had on the James River until additional boats could be built.<sup>51</sup> This ended any unity of effort among the Confederate armed services and greatly jeopardized the successful conduct of the campaign.

If Halleck had been capable of performing his tasks as Lincoln intended, the Suffolk Campaign could have shortened the Civil War. The initial movement of the Union's IX Corps forced Lee to detach a corps commander and two divisions to meet the

perceived threat to the southern capital. Lee had foreseen the danger. If the combined forces of IX Corps and Dix's command moved toward Richmond, Lee would have to counter by detaching still additional forces or fall back entirely from his defense along the Rappahannock. This would have provided greater freedom of movement to Hooker, allowing the full weight of his superior numbers to be used against Lee. Halleck, however, failed to see this possibility, and unity of effort between the two Union commands failed to materialize.

Union unity of effort between the Union Army and Navy was accomplished through a spirit of "cooperation." There was no designated joint commander. This spirit of cooperation was fueled by the professionalism and personalities of the individuals involved. That cooperation had become strained due to Lincoln's executive order approving the Army's issuance of trade permits. The animosity between Admiral Lee and General Dix permeated their commands and put at risk the successful defense of Suffolk. This interservice fight received attention even in the New York Herald, charging the Navy with not fully cooperating with the Army in defense of Suffolk.<sup>52</sup>

Although the respective operational commanders were not cooperating, the commanders at the scene, General Getty and Lieutenant Lamson, were. At the outset, they quickly established an understanding and positioned their forces for mutual support. Signals were established to locate and warn of possible Confederate river crossings. They planned and conducted a

successful amphibious operation and captured the key position at Hill's Point. Any successes enjoyed by the Union's cooperation along the Nansemond River were due to these two, Getty and Lamson.

The second critical fundamental of joint warfare, examined in the context of the Suffolk Campaign, is "Concentration of Military Power". Joint Pub 1 states that careful selection of strategic and operational priorities aids concentration at the decisive point and time.<sup>53</sup> Identification of enemy and friendly centers of gravity, and decisive points, are critical in order to correctly concentrate force. In April, 1863, the decisive point in the defense of Suffolk was Fort Huger at Hill's Point. It is obvious that joint planning did not occur prior to Longstreet's arrival. If the Union gunboats, as stated by the Army, were imperative to the defense of Suffolk, Fort Huger should have been fortified and garrisoned with a force strong enough to hold it. After this planning failure had been recognized, and Fort Huger taken by an amphibious operation, Peck compounded the problem by abandoning the position. This failure to understand the needs of his sister service placed the gunboats at risk and jeopardized his mission of holding Suffolk.

At the operational level, Suffolk itself was a decisive point--for the Confederates because it controlled a vast agricultural area, and for the Union because it represented part of the key defenses of Norfolk, the headquarters of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. The port was key to maintaining



the blockade, which was starting to affect the sustainment of the southern war effort. The loss of Norfolk as a naval base would have had serious effects on the naval blockade. Whether it was Longstreet's intention to take Suffolk in order to threaten Norfolk cannot be ascertained. Had that opportunity arisen, however, Longstreet may have "developed the situation." After President Davis' denial of the Confederate fleet, Longstreet seemed content in accomplishing only his related mission, that of securing the foodstuffs within the outlying counties. Longstreet could have taken Suffolk without the support of his navy. He concentrated the necessary force at Hill's Point and negated one of the Union's centers of gravity, their gunboats.

The upper portion of the river was now open to a Confederate river crossing which, if accomplished, would have cut off the garrison at Suffolk. The defenders of Suffolk, many of which were raw recruits, had only twenty days' rations.<sup>54</sup> That Longstreet did not take advantage of this shows that he no longer considered taking Suffolk necessary. In his memoirs, Longstreet writes,

The accounts we gained indicated that Suffolk could be turned and captured with little loss, but as we had given it up the year before as untenable, and were liable to be called upon at any moment to give it up again, it appeared that the cost of the whistle would be too high.<sup>55</sup>

Lee violated the fundamental of concentration when he dispatched Longstreet to negate the perceived threat against the capital. He tried to lessen this violation of concentration of force by retaining operational control over Hood's and Pickett's

division. When he did allow Longstreet to go to Suffolk, he again violated concentration of force, but this time, did so in order to enhance the fundamental of sustaining operations.

The final fundamental for examination in relation to the Suffolk Campaign, is "Sustaining Operations". Joint Pub 1 states that sustaining operations at the strategic and operational levels underwrites agility, extension of operations, and freedom of action.<sup>56</sup> This fundamental is key to understanding the operational campaign significance of the Suffolk Campaign. Lee, already facing overwhelming odds across the Rappahannock, further reduced his force when he allowed Longstreet to conduct the Suffolk Campaign. He had no choice. The Army of Northern Virginia had been on reduced rations for some time. The immediate vicinity of the Rappahannock where they were encamped could no longer sustain them. Fodder for the horses was also in short supply. In other words, Lee had no choice but to send a portion of his army to forage for supplies. Suffolk controlled a vast agricultural area that had not, thus far, been touched by the war. By sending Longstreet to Suffolk, Lee hoped to provide himself with enough subsistence to give himself the freedom of action to go on the offensive. As early as April 9, two days before the start of Longstreet's campaign, Lee wrote President Davis.

The readiest method of relieving the pressure upon General Johnston and General Beauregard would be for this army to cross into Maryland. This cannot be done, however, in the present

condition of the roads, nor unless I can obtain a certain amount of provisions and suitable transportation.<sup>57</sup>

Lee was trying to provision his army so he could achieve the flexibility and freedom of action that a sustained army affords. He needed the freedom of action to invade the North in order to relieve the pressure at Vicksburg. Lee was willing to violate concentration of force now for freedom of action later. In fact, the Suffolk Campaign did provide some help to Hooker. Two of Lee's veteran divisions and their Corps commander, who would have been at Chancellorsville, were engaged at Suffolk. It is a testimony to his generalship that even with a reduced force, Lee was still able to defeat Hooker at Chancellorsville.

Longstreet's commissary agents, operating in North Carolina and southeastern Virginia, were successful in obtaining food stuffs for the Army of Northern Virginia. Major Thomas J. Goree, Longstreet's aide, stated, in a letter to his sister, that their foraging operations obtained enough subsistence to feed General Lee's Army for two months.<sup>58</sup> This allowed Lee to assume the offensive, culminating at a then little-known town named Gettysburg.

## **Conclusion**

The Suffolk Campaign, almost forgotten among the annals of American Civil War, nevertheless provides lessons relevant today to a joint force commander. Although unity of effort examined in the Suffolk Campaign has changed from cooperation to joint commands, the necessity for knowing and understanding the capabilities of our sister services is paramount. The art of jointness is the ability to communicate with our sister services to understand better each others' needs and weaknesses. Jointness is training together as a joint task force, so we can go through not only the planning sequence, but also the execution of an operation.

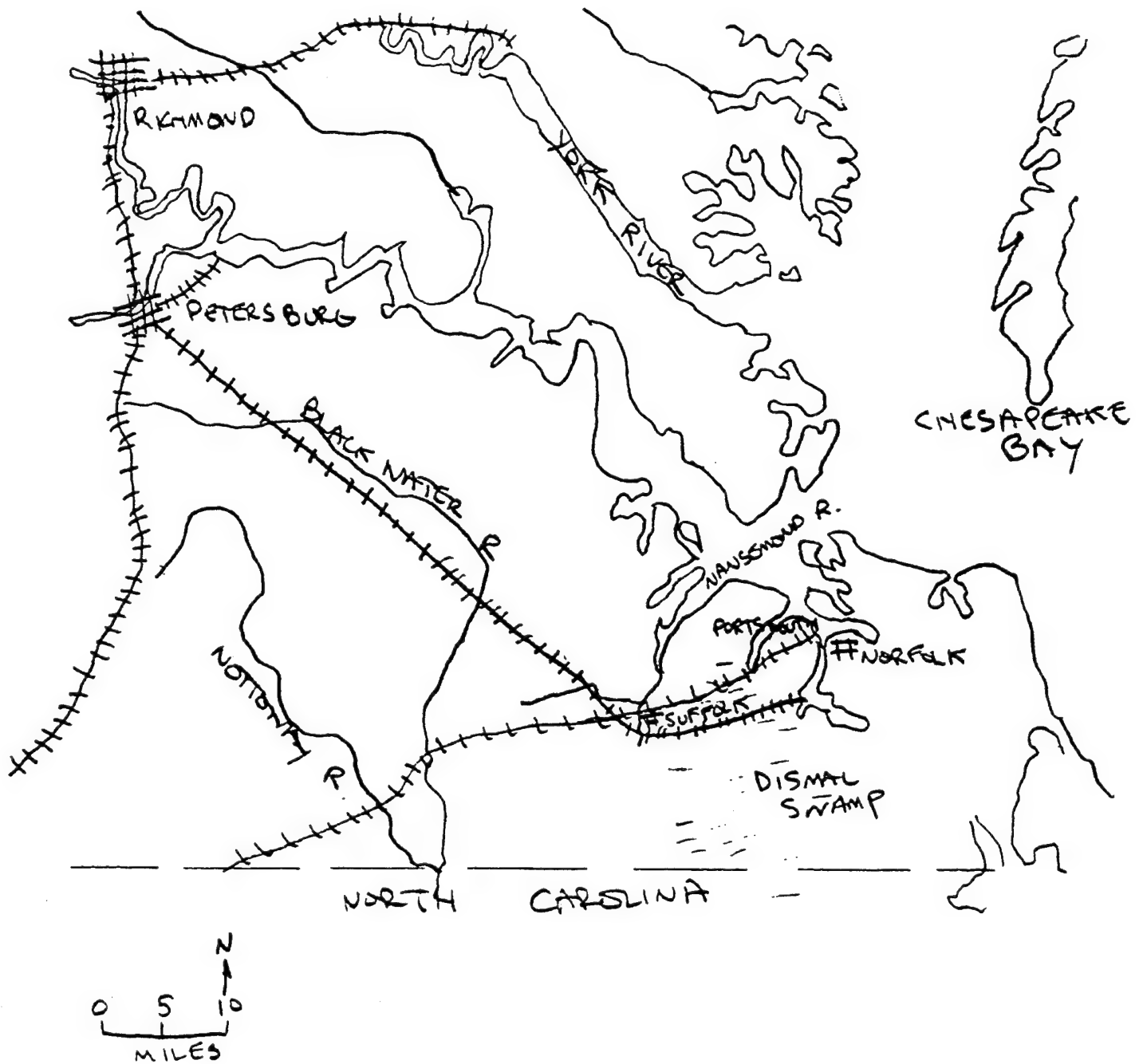
The identification of centers of gravity and decisive points are just as important now as they were during the Civil War. These determine where to concentrate the force and even more importantly, what force within the joint task force is best suited to apply against a particular point.

Recently, one senior ranking officer expressed concern that as the respective services compete for existing resources, the spirit of jointness may wane. I hope not. The lessons of history and the blood paid to learn these lessons should not be forgotten.

The Armed Forces of the United States owes much to these explorers of jointness. We must continue to learn from their mistakes so they are not repeated in the twenty-first century.

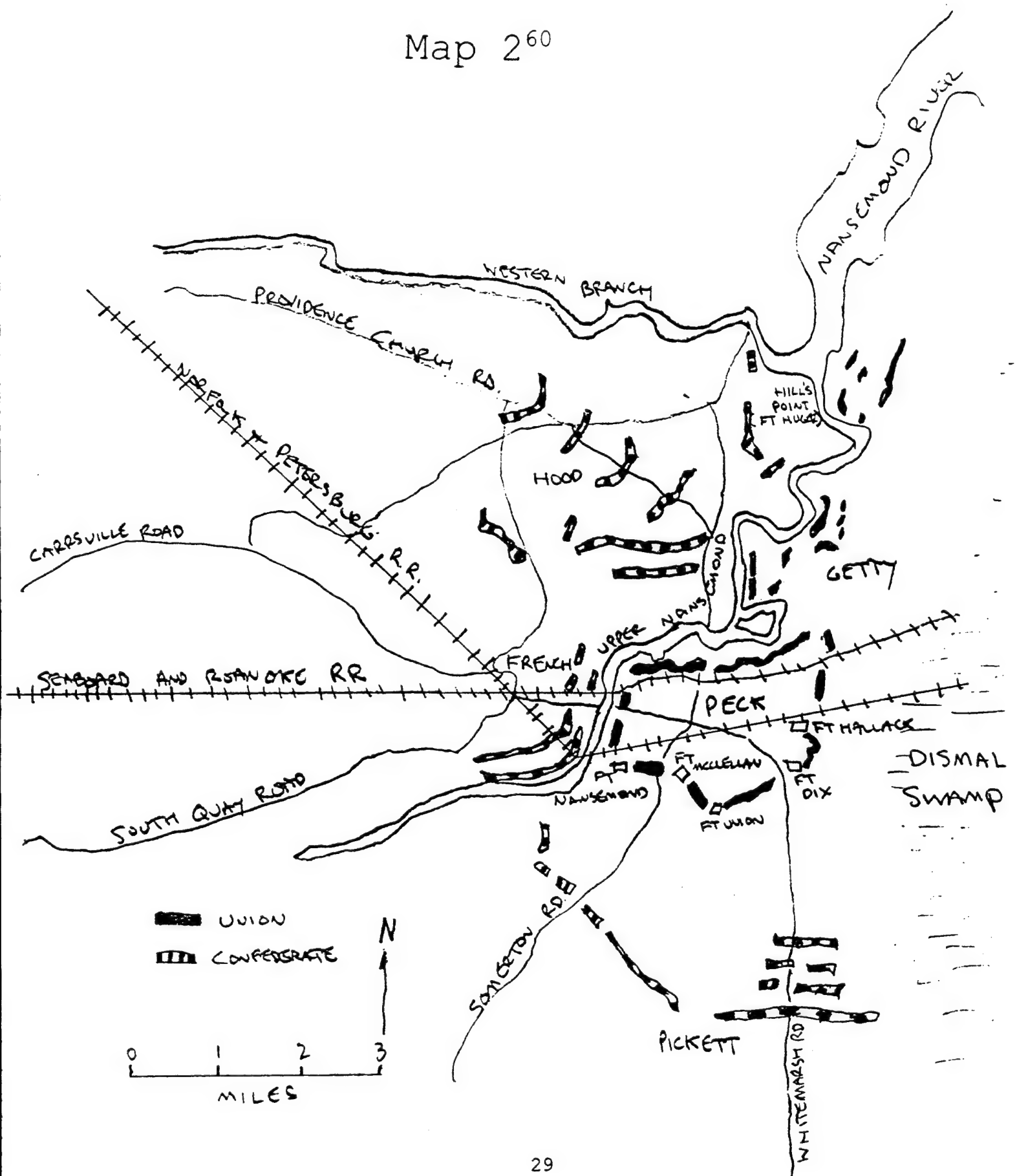
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Map 1<sup>59</sup>



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Map 2<sup>60</sup>





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## Notes

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6. Thomas Robson Hay and Donald Bridgman Sanger, *James Longstreet* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), p. 119.
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12. Hay and Sanger, p. 121.
13. Stevens, p. 197.
14. Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), p. 234.
15. Hay and Sanger, p. 121.

16. Stevens, pp. 198-199.
17. Dowdey, p. 411.
18. *Official Records, Series I, Vol. 18*, pp. 631-632.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 896.
20. Cormier, p. 13.
21. *Official Records, Series I, Vol. 18*, pp. 915-916.
22. *Ibid.*, p 873.
23. *Ibid.*, p 890.
24. *Ibid.*, pp 922-923.
25. *Ibid.*, p 970.
26. *Ibid.*, p 927.
27. *Ibid.*, p 994.
28. *Ibid.*, p 954.
29. *Ibid.*, p 970.
30. Stewart Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Civil War* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1988), p. 184.
31. Cornish and Laas, p. 124.
32. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Vol. 8* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894-1922), pp. 20-21.
33. Sifakis, p. 495.
34. Wert, p. 235.
35. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, p. 716.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 713-714; Stevens, p. 206.
37. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, pp. 714, 717.
38. Stevens, p. 201.

39. *Official Records, Series I, Vol. 18, p. 944.*
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41. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies, pp. 751, 754-756; Theodore P. Savas, "Longstreet Takes Command", America's Civil War #2 (1990), p. 41.*
42. *Official Records, Series I, Vol. 18, p. 675.*
43. *Ibid., p. 1025.*
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid., p. 1032.*
46. *Hay and Sanger, p. 146.*
47. *Official Records, Series I, Vol. 18, p. 1034.*
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49. *Hay and Sanger, p. 121.*
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